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The advantages of repeat interviews in a study with pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers: piecing together the jigsaw

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Qualitative interviewing is a commonly used approach in the social sciences and is generally regarded as an effective way of developing understandings about everyday experiences and the meanings people attach to them. Where fieldwork time-frames are relatively short, a single interview with each participant is common. This paper explores the potential benefits of adopting a repeat-interview design even when research time-frames are short. Illustrative examples from a study of the educational experiences of pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers are used to show what additional data were gathered via the use of repeat interviews as well as how this impacted on data quality. The key benefits of repeat interviews relate to the quality of the relationship that developed with participants over time, the opportunities this afforded to develop understandings about multiple identities and shifting realities and the way in which they allowed the researcher to seek clarification or additional information about issues raised in earlier interviews. The paper concludes that repeat interviews provide opportunities not available within a single-interview research design and that such an approach is particularly appropriate for research that deals with vulnerable populations and sensitive issues or research which aims to capture something about events, experiences and perceptions over time.

Keywords: qualitative research; repeat interviews; pregnant schoolgirls

Introduction

Qualitative interviewing, in its various forms, is a commonly used approach within the social sciences (Bryman 2004; Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Underpinning diverse practices is the view that it is an appropriate way of tapping into the everyday lives of research participants, the meanings they attach to their experiences and issues of identity and representation (Elliott 2005; Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Through its rich descriptions, it provides deep insights into social phenomena that enable researchers to look beyond the 'what' and to also learn about the 'how' and the 'why'. In this way, it complements hypothesis-driven quantitative research.

In generic research texts (Bryman 2004; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2000), and chapters on qualitative interviewing in well-known edited collections (Fontana and Frey 2005; Rapley 2004), and in books on interviewing (Kvale and Brinkmann

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2009), the single interview is the implied default and the advantages, disadvantages or appropriateness of repeat interviews to specific research situations is rarely explored in any depth or detail. Readers of these texts are prompted often to consider *how many* participants are to be interviewed to meet their research aims (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 113), but rarely to consider *how many times* each participant is to be interviewed.

Yet interviewing participants on multiple occasions is common within many research disciplines. The ethnographic research undertaken by anthropologists, the life histories, oral histories and case studies used by a range of social scientists, the development theories of educationalists and therapeutic work of psychologists have traditionally involved multiple meetings with research participants over extended periods (Holland, Thomson, and Henderson 2006). More recently, qualitative longitudinal approaches have been taken up within childhood studies and community studies as well as more widely. Timescapes (2012), for example, was a five-year Economic and Social Research Council-funded project in the UK which consisted of seven separate studies and explored the changing nature of personal life and relationships across the life course. Research such as this demonstrates the growing interest in the contribution that qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) can make to both policy and practice (Neale and Flowerdew 2003).

There is currently no clear definition of QLR and studies falling under this broad umbrella are wide ranging in their aims, theoretical perspectives, frequency of data collection and length between different phases of data collection (Holland, Thomson, and Henderson 2006). One feature common to all, however, is that temporality is built into the research process and data are collected from participants on multiple occasions.

Such studies offer some distinct advantages over single interviews. They are prospective rather than retrospective and are therefore particularly useful for documenting change over time and providing opportunities for participants to reflect on changes as they are happening (Saldana 2003). Subsequent interviews can be tailored for each individual and also provide opportunities to ask follow-up questions and gain insights into why a particular intervention was effective (Farrall 2006). They also allow researchers to make connections between individual experiences and larger social and institutional factors and thus have the potential to reveal links between the micro and the macro (Neale and Flowerdew 2003). This combination of advantages means that they offer a powerful alternative to single-interview qualitative studies.

The research described in this paper took place over a shorter time-frame than studies that are typically defined as QLR; however, it shared several important commonalities and thus can be considered an example. It involved a number of waves of data collection, aimed to document change over time, and was driven by an ongoing relationship between the researcher and the researched (Holland, Thomson, and Henderson 2006). Throughout this paper, I highlight the similarities between my research and broad understandings about QLR as a way of revealing the potential benefits of using repeat interviews even when time-frames are short. Using illustrative examples from a study of the educational experiences of pregnant teenagers and schoolgirl mothers, I show what additional information was gathered via the use of repeat interviews and how they supported my aim of providing 'thick' descriptions (Geertz 1973) and holistic understandings about this particular group of young women. I also explore how repeat interviews supported the sort of relationship between the researcher and the participant that enabled these positive outcomes.

I begin the paper by providing brief details about the research and outlining why repeat interviews were befitting to my research questions and the way I wished to

conduct it. I then look at what happened in practice and reflect on how my research outcomes were enhanced through the repeat-interview process. I argue that repeat-interview designs be considered even when research time-frames are short and suggest that they are particularly appropriate when dealing with sensitive issues or vulnerable populations and when gaining authentic accounts requiring a high degree of trust between the researcher and the participants.

The research

The fieldwork that forms the basis of this paper took place between February 2007 and May 2008 within the context of a larger doctoral study which aimed to investigate the connection between education and the broader, everyday lives of pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers. I wished to understand something of the circumstances under which they became pregnant, how significant others in their lives reacted and about what changed and how it changed as events unfolded and pregnancy progressed to motherhood – and I wanted to understand the interface between these things and the expectation that they be in education, employment or training (EET). I was interested in exploring how the national policy of supporting pregnant and mothering teenagers to stay in education was experienced by young women themselves. The study tackled questions such as where and how did education fit into young women's lives, what barriers existed in terms of continuity of education, what supports were in place to overcome those barriers and how did young women experience the dual roles of motherhood and student?

Part of my research involved in-depth, semi-structured repeat interviews with 14 young women in one local authority in England. They were accessed, with the support of the teenage pregnancy co-ordinator and local authority reintegration officer, through a range of educational institutions and services. At the time of the first interview, participants ranged in age from 15 to 18 years, with the majority (11 young women) being aged 16 or 17 years. Nine were already parents, while the remaining 5 were pregnant and 12 had been of statutory school age when they became pregnant. Nine were interviewed three times over the 16-month period, three were interviewed twice and I lost contact with two who were interviewed just once. The time lapse between interviews differed across the sample depending on what was happening in their lives at the time but ranged from seven weeks to seven months with an average of four and a half months between interviews. For any given participant, my contact with the participant spanned approximately one year. All names of people used in this paper are fictitious.

Interviews as a relational encounter

Central to my approach was an assumption that an interview is a relational encounter where both parties are mutually influenced by each other and where content and meanings are co-constructed (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Kitzinger (2004) summarizes key points noted by other qualitative researchers with her statement: 'The way people talk about their experiences depends on who they are talking to, what they have been asked, what shared knowledge they think can be assumed, and what kinds of reactions they anticipate and receive' (133).

I therefore needed to consider how the young women in my study might view me and what impact this might have on the research process and outcomes. In some

respects, we had little in common. I was approximately 30 years their senior, have no personal experience of pregnancy or motherhood, let alone teenage motherhood, and grew up in a different country. These aspects of who I was as a researcher may have had some advantages. In essence, I was an interested but ignorant outsider. They were clearly the experts, not only on their own lives, but also specifically in relation to pregnancy, motherhood and the ins and outs of the English education system. I was explicit with them about my unwillingness to make assumptions about certain things.

Defining one's status as an insider or an outsider, however, is not necessarily straightforward especially in repeat interviews where the relationship is likely to change over the course of the study. Using the concepts 'friend, stranger, neither, both', Reinharz (1992) gives four different examples of interviewer/interviewee relationship, arguing that each is appropriate for different circumstances or research foci. She suggested that one advantage of being a stranger is that participants may feel able to talk more freely because the researcher does not know anyone else with whom they associate. On the other hand, being a stranger may also result in more guarded responses than what otherwise might be the case. In my case, I was initially a stranger. However, over the course of the research, I became less of a stranger – although I still did not associate with anyone else in their world. As other researchers have found (Schultz 2001), I was also an outsider to whom they could direct questions and whose experience and knowledge they could tap into. Five participants in particular used me as a resource, and for others, by the second and third interviews, the questions were not just one way. And on one occasion, I was corrected by a participant over the phone when I implied that I was a stranger and she replied 'you don't feel like a stranger'. My status as an insider or an outsider was thus difficult to specify, but what transpired in interviews will have been influenced by their changing perception of me as 'friend, stranger, neither, both'.

Research considerations

Three key considerations guided my decision to adopt a repeat-interview design, despite the relatively short fieldwork period. These related to my belief that they would support the sort of researcher–participant relationship that would lead to good research outcomes, as well as their pragmatic advantages and my desire to document change over time.

A key difference between single-interview and repeat-interview research is the potential to form a different sort of relationship. In her well-documented work on becoming a mother (1979) and her subsequent feminist commentary on interviewing (2002), Oakley discusses the rationale behind her choice of repeat interviews. In her case, the personal nature of her enquiries and her desire for a less hierarchical and more collaborative and trusting relationship with participants were key. Her work highlights the appropriateness of repeat interviews when the focus of the study deals with the more sensitive or personal and where data quality is therefore more likely to be influenced by relational aspects of the interview encounter (Oakley 1999).

In my research, the degree of trust would also be important and this is likely to increase over time. The repeat-interview design allowed the participants to make more informed judgements about who I was, my motivations for undertaking the research, my genuine interest in what they had to say and the likelihood of me being non-judgmental about something they said. The latter may be particularly important

for young women who are highly visible to a negative public gaze through the campaign to reduce teenage conceptions, sensationalized media coverage of exceptional cases and extreme caricatures such as Vicky Pollard in the comedy series Little Britain who epitomizes the feckless, welfare-dependent teenage mother. As I would learn, stigma and discrimination were a constant presence that pervaded all aspects of their lives.

A single interview was unlikely to provide the detailed and deep accounts necessary for the holistic understandings I sought. Being able to listen to (or read) the first interview again before undertaking the second one provides opportunities to follow up lines of enquiry missed in the first interview (Elliott 2005). Reporting some of what was said in a previous interview not only demonstrates interest and that participants have been listened to, thus enhancing trust, but also provides opportunities to get 'corrective feedback' on interpretations and comments (Reinharz 1992). Repeat interviews also allow for greater flexibility. Subsequent interviews can be tailored to individuals, based on what was said in the previous interview (Farrall 2006).

Repeat interviews are also particularly appropriate when the research aims to produce information about change over time (Elliott 2005; Miller 1998; Saldana 2003). The young women in my study faced a number of key transitions: the change from pregnancy to motherhood and from compulsory to post-compulsory education and changes in living circumstances. They also provide opportunities to tap into the fluidity and multiplicity of a participant's experiences and 'subject positions' (Alldred 1998) than that offered by single interviews.

The following examples illustrate how some of these points played out in practice in my study. As can be seen, the different factors did not necessarily occur in isolation from one another but rather, for each individual, resulted from a unique interplay of factors.

Seeking clarification: A-levels[1] *or teaching assistant course*

My decision to use repeat interviews was partly pragmatic. I knew from previous interview experiences that unexpected events beyond the control of the researcher, such as shortened interview times or lack of privacy, sometimes compromise outcomes. Examples from this study include being asked to vacate a booked room partway through an interview or having others enter a private space, thus making it inappropriate to broach certain topics. In these cases, the 'second bite of the apple' (Elliott 2005) provided by the repeat-interview design was an important way of minimizing the limiting impact of these events.

Previous research had also taught me that reading an interview transcript often left me with as many questions as answers. What did she mean by that? How did that work? Where did this person or event fit with the other events or perceptions that had been recounted? A second interview provided the opportunity not just to verify understandings formed in the first interview but to also seek clarification on things that I had not fully understood. I use part of Rebecca's story to illustrate this.

Rebecca, the oldest participant, had just turned 18 and had a two-year-old son when I met her. In our initial interview, in the context of explaining her views about leaving her child in a nursery while she attended college, Rebecca spoke about an A-level course *and* a teaching assistant course. It was only retrospectively when reading through her transcript did I realize that completing two courses in the time-scale I understood would have been impossible. Our subsequent interview provided the

opportunity for Rebecca to explain that she had discontinued her A-levels three months into the course because the college had objected to her taking a mobile phone call from her son's nursery during class. She recounted

> The college was really like sort of strict and they didn't . . . well I had Damian in the day nursery and obviously I wanted to keep my phone on . . . and it was against college rules for my phone to be on in the classroom . . . and one time it rang and it said '[name of nursery]' so I just answered it in the classroom, 'is everything all right'. I couldn't leave it. And they said you either leave your phone at home or you leave yourself at home.

Rebecca got no support for her particular circumstances and felt that she had to choose between her course and being contactable by her child's nursery. As the latter was clearly important to her, she chose to discontinue her course. Despite this setback, Rebecca's educational motivation remained high and she enrolled in another course – however, as she was now partway through the college year, her options were limited. Nevertheless, she went on to complete a teaching assistant course at a different college where she was allowed to take her phone into class with her.

This part of Rebecca's account illustrates how the second interview provided an opportunity to clarify an apparent discrepancy and, in doing so, to gain additional information. I had not anticipated that her explanation would be so pertinent to my research focus of identifying factors that enhance or inhibit the educational achievement and continuity of pregnant or mothering teenagers. It is a sad irony that among the 14 participants, Rebecca was the only one who had enough A–C General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)[2] grades to enrol in an A-level course and one of only two who spoke about the possibility of higher education – yet the inflexible stance of that particular college with regard to her need to be contactable by her child's nursery meant that continuing was simply not an option. Without the second interview, this part of her narrative and the issue that it raised about the lack of flexibility in some colleges would have been missed.

Understanding the bigger picture: school, boring or what?

In exploring the connection between education and the broader, everyday lives of pregnant and mothering schoolgirls, I wanted to understand something about young women's schooling experiences *prior* to becoming pregnant. Demographic studies reveal a strong correlation between teenage pregnancy and poor educational outcomes (Berrington et al. 2005; Kiernan 1995), while other research, both quantitative and qualitative, reveals dislike of school to be common among pregnant and mothering teenagers (Bonell et al. 2005; Dench, Bellis, and Tuohy 2007; Hosie 2007). In line with these studies, many of the young women in my research had been disaffected low achievers. The teenage pregnancy research, however, sheds very little light on the 'why' or 'how' of these research outcomes. Untangling the complex multitude of factors that contribute to such findings is not easy, but the repeat-interview design helped produce the holistic understandings I sought. I use Stacy's story to show how each interview shed a little more light on the range of factors that had contributed to her severe disaffection from school prior to becoming pregnant. I found that systemic structures that operate to construct some pupils as failures played a part. This subsequently allowed me to capitalize on one of the key advantages of QLR – the ability to make more meaningful links between the micro and the macro (Neale and Flowerdew 2003).

Stacy had become pregnant in her final year of secondary school and was continuing her education at an Entry to Employment (e2e) programme for pregnant and mothering teenagers. Speaking about her schooling experiences prior to becoming pregnant, Stacy explained that Years 7, 8 and 9 (the first three years of secondary schooling) had passed smoothly enough. It was not until Year 10 that things started to go dramatically downhill to the extent that she eventually self-excluded and stopped attending school altogether. In our first interview, Stacy drew attention to teaching style as a possible contributory factor and she referred to school as 'boring'.

> You know, in Year 7, 8 and 9 you like the teacher and the way they teach. You get to Year 10 and Year 11 and you get a different teacher cause they change and you don't really like them . . . and it's just [pause] boring.

In our second interview, Stacy again drew attention to changes in teaching between the earlier and later years of school, but she also shed light on her previous reference to school as 'boring'. She noted finding the pressure of coursework difficult and also that she liked the practical side of things. Physical education, for example, was a subject she had enjoyed until it became more theoretical and students were regularly tested on the names of skeletal, musculature and other bodily systems and she began falling behind in her coursework. She recounted

> It [Year 9] was all right, but under pressure, like with the SATs,[3] choosing your options for Year 10, I just didn't really take interest. I used to love PE but when the coursework started, I didn't like it . . . knowing all the bones . . . the theory lessons . . . knowing about the cardiovascular system. I preferred the practical side of things.

She was also more explicit about the pressure of GCSEs.

> The first few years of school aren't like the last few years, cause the first years of school you learn spelling and reading and stuff like that and when you hit Year 9, 10 and 11 it's all coursework and it's all about your GCSEs . . . and like with the coursework it all piles up on top. [pause] I got behind on *so* much coursework.

Her account highlights how educational structures – namely, the considerable emphasis on student attainment in GCSE coursework and examinations – played a role in her alienation from school. This finding resonates with other research that reveals the alienation experienced by some pupils (Kinder, Wakefield, and Wilkin 1996; Osler and Vincent 2003; Thomson 2002). As Thomson (2002) points out, 'The selective academic curriculum is by its very construction one that produces success, average achievement and failure' (68). Stacy's account adds some weight to the view that failure to measure up to the narrow academic criteria required of the 'good' student (McLeod and Yates 2006) can produce feelings of alienation and destroy students' confidence in their ability to succeed in education (Cassen and Kingdon 2007; Reay 2006).

This shift in understanding about school being vaguely 'boring' to one of 'it's all about GCSEs' and the pressure to perform according to a very narrow set of academic standards would have been missed without the repeat interviews. In my subsequent analysis, I was able to make more meaningful links between social class and educational outcomes, thus highlighting an issue that is absent or muted within policy and popular representations of pregnant teenagers where blame for poor school

performance is located primarily within 'the feckless parasitic individual who has failed to grasp the opportunities open to them' (see critique of 'aspiration' by Francis and Hey 2009). Being able to reframe stigmatizing representations such as these within their broader social and educational contexts was an important outcome of my research.

The zig-zag route to college: academic versus pastoral support

As well as providing opportunities for seeking clarification or gaining a fuller, deeper understanding of some aspects of a participant's life, including links between the micro and the macro, repeat interviews also allow researchers to document change over time – indeed, this is one of the key aims of QLR (Neale and Flowerdew 2003). As Farrall (2006) illustrates in his work with offenders, learning about how and why particular interventions are effective is an additional benefit.

The national teenage pregnancy strategy aims to support pregnant and mothering teenagers to stay in education (Social Exclusion Unit 1999), thus gaining understandings about what helped and why was central to my inquiry. In the following example, neither the nonlinear trajectory of one young women's transition to college nor the specific ways that her e2e programme supported this successful transition were evident until the third interview. This example also illustrates the relational change that typically occurred between me and the participants as the research progressed and how this contributed to better research outcomes.

Sonia, a 17-year-old teenage mother, was attending an e2e programme when I first met her. This national initiative for 16–18-year-olds who are not in post-16 education aims to assist young people to develop the motivation, confidence and skills to move on from e2e to other forms of EET. This particular e2e programme catered specifically for pregnant and mothering teenagers.

In our second interview, in the context of discussing her future plans, Sonia reported that she wanted to go to college but she was unsure about which course she might do. In our third interview, I learned that she had started a Level 2 Health and Social Care course and was clearly enjoying it.

I was curious about Sonia starting at Level 2 because I had learned from our first interview that the unsupportive way her school had responded to her pregnancy, as well as the timing of her child's birth, meant that she had left school with no GCSEs. During this interview, she detailed the ways in which e2e had been helpful in preparing her for college and was of the view that she would not have succeeded without it. At first, this appeared to be due to the formal qualifications gained while at e2e. She achieved several Open College Network accreditations and excelled in her Adult Literacy And Numeracy tests. This enabled her to start at Level 2 without GCSEs.

What I had learned so far was useful – Sonia had progressed from e2e to college and formal qualifications had been crucial to this successful transition. However, understanding more about the nature of this transition and aspects of her programme that supported this transition was pertinent to the educational focus of my study.

I was aware that the third interview was very different from our first one. We were more relaxed with each other and she took more control. The unsolicited information about her son's bleeding nose at the nursery, his language development and her management of potential eviction from her flat suggested that I was no longer viewed simply as an interested stranger. This more relaxed, more trusting relationship meant that she offered more and I questioned less. As was the case with other interviewees,

our changing relationship resulted in discovering things about which I would not have thought to ask.

Puzzled about her starting a Level 2 college course without any GCSEs, I enquired about the qualifications she had gained at e2e. She did not answer my question directly but rather responded with a question of her own. 'Do you want to see my folder?' She disappeared upstairs, leaving me to be entertained by her two-year-old, and returned to sit beside me on the couch so we could browse through her folder together. She restarted the conversation with

> We get it [the folder] at the beginning and just keep it and add to it as we go on. [pointing to a specific place where there is a large gap between dates] You can see here I went to college to try and get some of my GCSEs, but I didn't like it . . . so I went *back* to e2e.

I wondered what was different for her now at college compared with her first attempt.

> K: [pause] So what's different for you, going to college now from that first time?
> S: I'm more confident now.
> K: From being at e2e?
> S: Yeah. We did a lot at e2e.

During the interview, Sonia continued to talk about some of the less formal aspects of her e2e programme and how these resulted in an increase in personal confidence and self-belief. This was verified by other students who spoke about the strong pastoral dimension of their relationships with staff there. What appeared to be important was that the staff recognized all aspects of student identities in non-stigmatizing ways, including the fact that they were pregnant or young mothers. They also conveyed an expectation and belief that they could succeed in education.

Sonia's account was a pertinent reminder that this young woman's negative school experiences during her pregnancy and after the birth of her child resulted in her leaving school with no GCSEs and feeling like an academic and a personal failure. It took her over a year at e2e to make that successful transition to college – but what I had not realized from the first two interviews was the zig-zag nature of that transition or how important the non-academic aspects of her e2e programme had been in supporting this transition. This example illustrates an emotional as well as a physical transition and enabled me to learn something about the 'how' and 'why' of her successful transition. It shows how Sonia's physical transition to college was facilitated by an internal growth in personal confidence that can partially be attributed to access to both pastoral and academic support in an environment where her life choices and current achievement levels were accepted in non-stigmatizing ways.

Changing perceptions

Accounts are not fixed or final and perceptions, subjectivities and identities are accepted by many as being fluid rather than fixed (Elliott 2005; Luttrell 2003; McDowell 2001; Parr 1998). Through my research, I wanted to explore not only the participants' actual experiences but also their perceptions of those experiences, whether these changed over time and, if so, in what ways. As the following examples show, the repeat interview is one way of tapping into these less observable aspects of a person's life and demonstrates the potential of repeat interviews to provide a movie rather than the snapshot of single interviews (Berthoud and Gershuny 2000).

Shae was 15 with a six-month-old son when I first met her. When discussing motherhood in our first interview, she identified two aspects that she found difficult: loss of freedom and financial stress. By the second interview, these issues had not changed; however, she appeared to view her situation in a more positive light. She, along with the majority of the participants, conveyed a 'that's life, got to get on with it' attitude. In contrast to much of the policy discourse and also the perspectives of many professionals, these young women did not necessarily see themselves as vulnerable victims of circumstances or socially isolated. In the following extract, I suggest to Shae that she seems to be looking on the bright side of life. She first replied 'yeah, you have to don't you' but then continued with her own observation of how her perception of her situation had changed over time.

> K: So you're someone that looks on things in a positive light?
> S: Yeah, you have to don't you. Mostly when I first had him it was like, 'oh I can't do this' or 'I can't do that' . . . my education and friends . . . but now, I'm not missing anything . . . nothing's changed really. I can still go out . . . and I'm at [the PRU]. At night there's people that want to look after him . . . cause his bed time is at 7.00 . . . but if it's going to the park or something, or into town or during the day he comes with me.

One of Shae's initial impressions of motherhood was that it was something that would prevent her from doing what she wanted to do socially and educationally. By the second and third interviews, she spoke much more positively about her situation. She no longer felt like she was missing out on anything; rather, her life was just different from what she had thought it would be. The repeat-interview design allowed these changing perceptions to be noted.

The next example is of 15-year-old Libby, who was attending a pupil referral unit with an on-site nursery when I first met her. She had a four-month-old baby and felt relaxed about leaving her baby in the nursery while she attended her lessons because she was close by should there be any problems and she also got to feed and change her daughter during the day.

Libby explained that in order to accomplish her goal of returning to school to complete her final year, she would have to leave her child with a childminder or in a nursery and would therefore be separated from her for a substantial part of the day. In our first interview, she was clearly anxious about the prospect of leaving her child in someone else's care. It appeared to be a matter of trust. She explained

> I'm not sure about a nursery. And if I got a childminder, they'd have to come to my house and look after her. I wouldn't trust her to take her to their house.

By the third interview, her situation and her perceptions had changed. Libby's child was happily attending a nursery, while Libby attended an e2e programme. She explained how she dropped her daughter off at a nursery close to where she lived before taking a bus to her education institution. She spoke positively about the nursery, valued the fact that the cost of childcare was covered through the Care to Learn[4] initiative and perceived social benefits to her child being there.

> She's in Lillybank [nursery] which is two minutes from where I live . . . so I drop her off and then come in on the bus. We get Care to Learn . . . so it's all right. If I wasn't in education, she wouldn't be at nursery because I wouldn't be able to afford it . . . but I prefer her to be at nursery cause she gets to meet other kids.

She later explained that making the adjustment to leaving her baby in a nursery and being away from her during the day had been hard for both her and her daughter, but she was pleased with her decision to use a nursery because it enabled her to say in education.

> It was hard at first [leaving Michelle at Lillybank] . . . but I prefer it now . . . cause every time I heard her cry at [the pupil referral unit] I got up to see what was wrong with her. But now she's much more independent. At first she didn't like it, she would cry when I left her [at nursery], but now she don't mind.

The repeat-interview design was able to show how Libby's subjective experience had moved from being anxious about leaving her child in the care of others to not only that of being comfortable with this new situation but also to that of perceiving benefits to her child being in a nursery.

Conclusions

Single interviews provide a useful snapshot of lived experience specific to particular time and place. They are appropriate for answering many sorts of research questions and have certain advantages over repeat interviews. They provide an efficient way of achieving a desired sample size and are more easily accommodated into the cost and time constraints of research where results are needed quickly and where fieldwork is limited to a year or two. They do not require the researcher to maintain contact with the participants over an extended period and thus reduce participant attrition and the relational demands that more extended studies place on both the researcher and the participants. They also avoid the amplification of ethical issues that inevitably arise in longitudinal research. Intrusion, dependency, distortion of life experiences and maintaining anonymity each become more complicated in a repeat-interview design, as do the issues of informed consent and closure (see Holland, Thomson, and Henderson 2006 for further discussion of these issues). For these reasons, they can be an attractive option.

However, as seen in this study, repeat interviews can present opportunities that are not available within a single-interview design and they are well suited to particular research questions, populations and approaches. In my research, some of the 'added value' can be attributed to the opportunity of having a 'second bite of the apple' (Elliott 2005). This was particularly important for those times where matters beyond the control of the researcher, such as unanticipated lack of privacy and shortened interview times, impacted on the quality or quantity of data collected. Equally important, the repeat-interview design also provided a valuable opportunity to verify and deepen understandings formed in the first interview, to follow up missed lines of enquiry or to seek additional clarification about some topic that had been discussed. In one example, the opportunity to follow up on an apparent discrepancy resulted in gaining additional information that was particularly pertinent to the focus of my study – namely, one participant's discontinuation from an A-level programme because of the college's inflexible response to her need to be contactable by her child's nursery.

In line with the rationale behind QLR, repeat interviews also provided opportunities to learn about transition and change. For the young women in my study, these included the transition from pregnancy to motherhood and from compulsory schooling to post-16 education. But their lives were in a state of flux in other ways and it was only the repeat interviews that enabled me to fully appreciate just how extensive and pervasive

this was. Many participants experienced multiple changes in accommodation, family relationships and EET status. I also learned more about the nature of change than I would have using single interviews. The nonlinear trajectory of one participant's transition to college was not evident until the third interview. Nor the importance to her of both the academic and non-academic aspects of her e2e programme in supporting that transition was evident.

Through my research, I wanted to explore more than just young women's actual experiences. As is the case in other examples of QLR, I was also interested in their perceptions of those experiences, whether these changed over time and, if so, in what ways. Repeat interviews were one way of tapping into these less tangible aspects of a person's life. One participant's attitudes towards childcare, for example, changed over the course of the study from being anxious about leaving her child in the care of others to perceiving benefits to her child being in a nursery. I also witnessed changes in their identities and how they viewed themselves and their situations and in their future plans.

Repeat interviews enabled me to make connections between the micro and the macro that were not obvious from a single interview. By providing a more holistic and situated understanding of young women's wider contexts, I could see the limitations of teenage pregnancy policy and the questionable assumptions on which it is based. I came to see, for example, how gender and their predominantly working-class orientations shaped their compulsory schooling experiences and their post-secondary education choices. These macro-factors also played a part in their sexual experiences and decisions about contraception and abortion, yet are conspicuously absent from both policy and dominant representations of teenage pregnancy. This allowed me to challenge normative assumptions about this marginalized group of young women and thus contribute to debates and policy about them.

The personal and potentially sensitive nature of the topics I wished to broach also made repeat interviews an appropriate choice. It is no doubt possible to talk about youthful pregnancy without talking about sex, contraception or abortion; however, I wished neither to collude with the silencing of adolescent sexuality that characterized some of their schooling experiences nor exclude certain topics from our dialogue. At the same time, I did not wish to replicate experiences that were recounted of medical professionals with their patronizing attitudes and intrusive questions. I was also aware that I was working with a socially stigmatized group and that the outcomes of the research would be heavily influenced by the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participants, in particular, the degree of trust. The multiple meetings allowed the time and space for trust to develop and made it easier to broach certain topics. Like the young people in Thomson and Holland's (2003) longitudinal research, those in mine became more confident and assumed more control of the interview space as the research progressed. This supported the holistic understandings I sought.

Although my research was a small-scale one and contact with any given participant spanned little more than 12 months, its aims and the way I wished to conduct it place it within broad definitions of QLR. My findings and analysis would undoubtedly have been different without repeat interviews, and in this paper, I have aimed to illustrate how they contributed to both the amount and quality of data I obtained. I conclude that repeat interviews are worthy of consideration even when time-frames are short and argue that they are particularly appropriate for research that deals with vulnerable populations and sensitive issues or research which aims to capture something about events, experiences and perceptions over time.

Notes

1. A-levels (advanced levels) are post-16 subject-based qualifications. They document competence at Level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework and are a key route into higher education.
2. National examinations taken at the end of compulsory schooling in England, Wales and Northern Ireland at age 16. A–C grades represent a pass.
3. SATs (Standardized Assessment Tests) are a mix of teacher-led and test-based assessments given to 7-, 11- and 14-year-olds across England to monitor attainment in English, science and mathematics. Those for 14-year-olds were discontinued in 2009.
4. This national initiative, supported by the teenage pregnancy strategy, provides up to £5125 per year to cover the cost of childcare and associated transport for a young person in EET.

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